

BACKGROUND CHECKS ARE NEEDED

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, an op-ed column in Tuesday's New York Times highlighted how fast, easy and unintrusive background checks for gun purchases can be if performed properly. Yet, this is not the story we are told by groups that oppose closing the gun show

loophole. According to the National Rifle Association, background checks often take days to complete. But according to the Department of Justice, 95 percent of background checks are completed within two hours, and according to the Violence Policy Center, a vast majority of background checks are completed within a few minutes.

The New York Times op-ed also highlighted why it is so important that we conduct these checks at gun shows. The author, Nicholas Kristof, cited the availability of .50 caliber semiautomatic rifles and assault rifles which sellers claim are powerful enough to penetrate bulletproof glass. It is common sense to make sure that criminals and other restricted buyers are prohibited from buying such lethal weapons. While any legitimate purchaser can buy such weapons from a federally licensed dealer after an instant background check, they can also be purchased from an unlicensed dealer at any gun show without a background check.

According to Bureau of Justice Statistics, between 1994 and 1999, over 22 million background checks were completed and more than 536,000 felons, fugitives and other prohibited persons were prevented from illegally purchasing firearms. But convicted criminals and suspected terrorists have reportedly used the gun show loophole to purchase firearms and smuggle them out of the United States. For example, in Florida, a man accused of having ties to the Irish Republican Army testified that he purchased thousands of dollars worth of machine guns, rifles and high-powered ammunition at gun shows and proceeded to smuggle them to Ireland. A 1999 study by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms found 314 cases of fraud at gun shows, involving 54,000 guns. To help eliminate this type of activity, I cosponsored Senator REED's Gun Show Background Check bill to close the gun show loop hole. This bill simply applies existing law governing background checks to persons buying guns at gun shows. I cosponsored that bill because I believe it would prevent criminals from getting guns.

The gun show loophole is an even more serious problem if .50 caliber semiautomatic rifles are available for sale. Gun dealers recognize that these weapons represent a very dangerous amount of firepower. The .50 caliber rifle has apparently been promoted as a weapon able to "wreck several million dollars worth of jet aircraft with one or two dollars worth of cartridge." These weapons are among the most powerful,

and least regulated, firearms legally available. According to one seller's Web site, "Never mind that the gun haters don't want you to have'em. Forget about the lily-livered whiners in Congress. Exercise your rights before it's too late." Even some dealers know that .50 caliber weapons are too powerful and too accessible to be ignored any longer. Tighter regulations are needed. That is why I cosponsored Senator FEINSTEIN's Military Sniper Weapon Regulation Act. This bill would strengthen the regulation of long-range .50 caliber sniper weapons.

I believe both pieces of legislation are common sense steps to ensure that guns do not get into the hands of criminals and other prohibited buyers. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting them and other pieces of common sense gun safety legislation.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO JOLENE FRANKEN

• Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, next week will mark a new beginning for the Iowa State Education Association when Jolene Franken steps down as President. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize Jolene for her many accomplishments as a teacher and the outstanding job she has done as the head of the organization representing Iowa teachers. She has done Iowa proud.

We are all familiar with the expression that teachers touch the future. Whenever I see these words I think of teachers like Jolene Franken, a woman who is passionate about education and our children. As an elementary teacher for thirty years in Iowa, she has touched the lives of thousands of children.

Jolene Franken earned her Bachelor of Science degree at Greenville College in Greenville, IL and Masters Degree from Northwest Missouri State University. Jolene exemplifies life long learning and has participated in additional professional development activities at the University of Northern Iowa and University of Iowa.

Most of Jolene's career has been spent teaching first grade, but she is always open to new challenges. Most recently, she taught academically talented elementary students in the Denison Community School District's Extended Learning Program. Jolene has also been active in the creative problem solving competition, "Destination Imagination," and has served as coach of the Iowa team for five years. Her Destination Imagination teams have participated in two World Championships. She has also been a driving force behind the Iowa State Academic Decathlon since its inception.

Jolene has also been an active member of the Iowa State Education Association and National Education Association throughout her career where

she has held numerous offices. As President of ISEA for the past four years, she has been a tireless advocate for children and public education. She has fought to increase awareness of the teacher shortage in Iowa, fought to increase teachers' salaries and has pushed for quality teacher mentor programs.

As a first grade teacher, Jolene understands the importance of reading and has been an avid participant in NEA's Read Across America Day. Every year on Dr. Seuss' birthday, Jolene dons a "Cat in the Hat" costume to visit Iowa schools and read to the children.

I commend and thank Jolene for her hard work to improve Iowa schools and educate Iowa's youth. Jolene's community, her State and her country are better off because of her years as an educator and leader for the futures of all of our children. While I have highlighted some of her accomplishments and interests over the years, the list is so much longer, and I speak from the heart when I say she will be missed. I know she will continue to be active on behalf of Iowa's children.

I also know that ISEA will be in good hands as John Hieronymus takes over as President. John is a math teacher from Iowa City and has served as vice-president of the organization for the past several years. Jolene Franken is a tough act to follow, but I know he is more than prepared to take on the challenging mission of leading ISEA. •

COMMEMORATING THE 58TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NORMANDY D-DAY INVASION ON JUNE 6, 1944

• Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate an event that took place 58 years ago today. Of course, I am speaking about the invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944. The magnitude of the event, its scope and complexity, even now, instills a sense of awe in all of us. It remains the largest air, land, and sea invasion ever undertaken. The invasion force of over 150,000 soldiers was supported by over 5,000 ships and 10,000 airplanes. These troops were from the United States, Britain, and Canada and included Free French and Polish forces under the overall command of General Dwight David Eisenhower.

The invasion sites, from west to east, were designated as Utah, Omaha, Sword, Juno, and Gold. The British Second Army was responsible for Sword, Juno, and Gold, while the U.S. First Army was responsible for Utah and Omaha. The U.S. 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions landed at Omaha Beach, the U.S. 4th Infantry Division came ashore on Utah. The 82nd and 101st Airborne Division were dropped behind the beaches. I might add that some of the Airborne troops arrived by glider, an operation in which I was a participant.

Although the invasion was ultimately successful, it was a very hard